

Interview with Matt Landrus

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Interviewer: Philip Pogue

Pogue: My name is Phil Pogue. We're on the campus of Lake Land College in Mattoon, Illinois for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library project on the history and development of the Illinois community college system. It's July 30, 2013.

We have with us today Matt Landrus, who will be talking about the history of Lake Land, as well as his experiences with the college, going back to 1996. Matt, thank you very much for being a participant in our project. Could you give us some information about yourself, your family and educational background?

Landrus: Sure. My name is Matt Landrus. I was born and raised here in Mattoon, Illinois. In fact, at the age of five, my parents bought the house about two-and-a-half, three miles from Lake Land College, and they still live there today. About sixteen years ago, I bought a home near Lake Paradise, which is about three miles from campus. So I guess I'd be known as a townie, so to speak.



Matt Landrus

My mom and dad are Ralph Landrus and Janet Landrus. Janet's from Neoga [Illinois], and my dad was originally from Jewett [Illinois], although he was adopted at the age of twelve. I came to Lake Land College from ninety-one through ninety-three, and after earning my associate [degree], transferred to EIU [Eastern Illinois University], earned a bachelor's and a master's at Eastern in ninety-six.

Pogue: You indicated that you've lived around the college, and you attended the college. What experiences had you had with Lake Land College?

Landrus: Lake Land was always one of those... Just in terms of the buildings themselves, [they] were always a presence. They were close to the house.

Lake Land also participates with, coordinates with ICTC [Illinois Consolidated Telephone Company], the telephone company, on a Special

Olympics family festival, and Mr. Lumpkin, who owns ICTC, Consolidated, always encouraged employees to work here at Lake Land on those Special Olympic days.¹ My dad was an employee of the telephone company, so I always knew about that, as well.

Yeah, and then I came to school here, the local community college. So it seemed natural. As a first-generation college student, attending a community college seemed to make sense, and attending one that was less than three miles from my house made even better sense.

Pogue: Could you give us some information about your student experience here? How did you find the quality of the classes, the instructors, and the equipment that you were using?

Landrus: I thought it was interesting in hindsight, once I started teaching here, and then more specifically when I started participating in the college's archives project, most of the faculty who were my instructors at the time were some of the original faculty members of the college. They'd been here for twenty-plus years. So most of them were in their late fifties, early sixties, and there really was kind of...at a point where there was a transition period. My composition classes, for example, took place in a traditional setting, with traditional desks. We didn't have access to computers. All of our formal work was either turned in hand-written, with a line skipped, or it was produced on a standard typewriter. My experience in a lot of ways is so much different than what the students today experience, where they're constantly using flash drives and electronic means to submit work and so on.

I enjoyed my classes here. I think, like a lot of students who are seventeen, eighteen years old, right out of high school, especially first-generation college students, you're not entirely certain what it is you're supposed to be doing in college. You're just trying to keep your head above water and earn some passing grades. Fortunately, I was able to do that.

Pogue: What kind of activities were you able to participate in while a student at Lake Land?

Landrus: To be completely honest, I think it reflected a shift that ultimately occurred in the last couple of decades. But when I was a student here, most people treated the school as a commuter school, at best, and it was not necessarily a place to join a lot of activities.

My second year here, however, I lived with three basketball players, and so I got really involved with coming to the sporting activities, whether that was for men or women. I worked with an English instructor on campus,

¹ Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organization for children and adults with intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities, providing year-round training and competitions to 5 million athletes and Unified Sports partners in 172 countries. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Olympics)

by the name of John Lansing Bennett, who at one time was the editor-in-chief of *Highlights* children's magazine and had been a freelance writer, a publisher and an editor and so on, so kind of in an informal setting. I worked with him on creating creative, non-fiction writing that he could... We could see it get published in different settings.

Pogue: Were you excited to be a student here at the college?

Landrus: I was. As a first-generation college student from my family, it was an exciting opportunity to pursue education at a level that they never had, including my oldest brother and my two parents. And neither set of my grandparents had ever attended college. It was exciting, and it was a little overwhelming.

But one of the characteristics, I think, of a true community college, is one where there's a fine line between coddling students and then encouraging them and recognizing they may not have a clear idea of where they're headed or where they want to go at that point. I found the instructors to be helpful in terms of recognizing that may have been a challenge for me.

Pogue: And you went up the road to Charleston, to Eastern Illinois University. How prepared were you for that in your junior and senior year?

Landrus: I think that academically, scholastically, I was prepared. I think that the shift was more internal. I think that, once I landed at a four-year school, I recognized that I was no longer in a transition phase, being in a community college.

No matter what community college you go to, there's always certain acronyms or abbreviations for what the school stands for. Lake Land College, for people from the area, it's the high school with ashtrays. The feeling was that, once you moved to a four-year school, you were really being tested at that point. I never felt like I wasn't academically prepared, but I felt like the transition was that I was a little more motivated and a little bit more directed.

Pogue: What led you to return to Lake Land as an instructor?

Landrus: The person that I mentioned, John Lansing Bennett, became a close friend of mine and a mentor when I was here on campus. He was the person that I stayed in touch with when I was at Eastern. I had John for about four classes when I was here at Lake Land.

The story is—and it's always been one of my fondest memories—when I was two weeks into student teaching at Effingham High School because my plan was that I was going to be a high school teacher... Two weeks into that student teaching experience, John Bennett called me and said that school at Lake Land was going to be starting that night. He called me on a Monday afternoon and said school started that day, and the first set of night classes had started and that the business department had called him and said,

“The person whose teaching our business report writing class—which is a non-transferable course—has cancelled, and we need someone to teach the class. Do you know any adjuncts who would be able to teach?”

He called and said, “Would you like to teach this class?” At that moment, probably the most important decision in my life, I said, “Yes, I’ll teach the class tonight.” I got off the phone, called my high school teacher that I was working with in Effingham—it was the first time I ever quit anything—and said, “I’m not coming back tomorrow morning. I’m done student teaching, and I’m going to pursue teaching at Lake Land.”

It was only a two-hour credit course. I wasn’t even signed up for graduate level courses, but I started teaching that class that night, and I could because I had my bachelor’s. Since it was non-transferrable. I didn’t need a master’s degree.

[I] taught the class and then Tuesday morning went back to Eastern and met with the division chair of the English department and asked if I could get special permission on an interim basis to get into the graduate program. That’s what started it. So, while I was pursuing my master’s, I would teach here at Lake Land, part-time, and teach non-transferrable courses for the business and English department.

It worked out perfectly that, when I finished my master’s degree, there was this upcoming mass exodus of retirees from our department. There were about four or five of the original faculty members who were leaving, and I’d been able to make some connections with them. Walking around campus with my own teaching load, I got to visit them. Yeah, that’s how that started.

Pogue: Why did you want to be in the field that you selected?

Landrus: I would love to say that I was inspired in some fashion by a great work of fiction or a poem that changed my life. But the reality is that, when I was in high school, I had a high school teacher by the name of Dell Willison, who inspired me and told me that my ability to manipulate the English language via the written word was impressive. He cultivated that and encouraged me to pursue English when I got to college. Since it was easier for me to do than math and science and so on, that’s what I decided to choose when I got here, and it just seemed to work out that way.

Pogue: When you started teaching here at Lake Land, how did the courses change from what you had had, or were they the same?

Landrus: That’s a great question. One of the first things that the new members of the English department decided to do was revisit some of our core classes, specifically Composition I and Composition II. What we discovered was that we were essentially teaching our classes, especially Comp II, which is the

research writing course, we were teaching it essentially the same way that Eastern Illinois University did.

It made sense, later on to me, that the reason why we did that was, when the college started, the state encouraged emerging young community colleges to visit their local four-year institution [and] use their course outlines. Eastern kind of treated Composition II more as a literature-based course. So, all of the research writing they would do would have some kind of literary element to it. It might be reading something from [Henry David] Thoreau or [Walt] Whitman or [Frédéric] Chopin and write a literary analysis about it.

That had morphed into our classes, where it was a really schizophrenic setting, because we were spending eight weeks trying to teach them how to write a research paper for any discipline other than literature. Then in the second half of the semester, we were doing literature. One of the first things we did—and it was different from my experiences here—was, we said, “Let’s remove that literature element and focus exclusively on the teaching of research writing for a variety of disciplines.” So that was something that certainly changed.

[Another was] the incorporation of computers in the classroom. Every single writing class that Lake Land offers today, for example, is done in the computer lab. A significant portion of our classes are now taught online. That was certainly different from my experience back in ninety-one and ninety-two.

Pogue: What had your assignments been since you’ve been at the college?

Landrus: Primarily, initially, I was asked to take over for Dwayne Lawson, who was retiring, in terms of his American literature courses, and then to do Composition I and Composition II. Since then, I’ve taught Intro to Literature and developed the college’s Intro to Fiction class. But primarily Composition I, Composition II.

Pogue: Could you give us some information about the college as a district, the boundaries, the towns that are found in it? And have those boundaries stayed stable over the forty-five years of the college’s history?

Landrus: First of all, Lake Land has the largest geographic district in the state. We have an enormously large area of land that we cover. Between sixty-six and seventy-two was a time when our district was ultimately formed. In sixty-six, there were seven original counties that, based on an open vote, the public chose to be part of the Lake Land College 517 District. That was Coles, Clark, Cumberland, Edgar, Moultrie and Shelby [Counties]. After that, over the next four years, five years, until 1972, other local communities chose to voluntarily be annexed into it, Dietrich, for example, and Effingham and Sullivan, Beecher City and Teutopolis.

We go as far east as, say, Martinsville, which is relatively close to the Indiana border. A lot of that was based on the legislature declaring that in seventy-four, all counties had to decide where they were going to belong or choose to decide where they were going to belong. Otherwise the state was going to make that decision for them.

So, between sixty-eight, sixty-nine, all the way up to seventy-two, you had a lot of these areas deciding to join Lake Land. There was some sense before that—and maybe the reason why they chose not to, initially—they didn't know if there'd be another community college. They didn't know if there was going to be one in Teutopolis or one that would work with a more southern, eastern part of the state. But ultimately, that's how many we have, a total of thirteen counties.

Pogue: What has your role been with the living archives?

Landrus: Near the end of Dr. Robert Luther's [Lake Land College's fourth president, 1988- 2006] tenure, I approached him with an idea of writing a book for the college. The college was nearing an anniversary at the time, getting close to maybe forty years, maybe it was two years out. I suggested that we write a book. He was excited about the prospects. But, A, we realized that the college's physical documents were horribly disorganized. Secondly, because he was leaving, it was difficult for him to commit to a project that may be long-term, if it was going to require money and resources.

Once he left, I approached Dr. William Thallemer [Lake Land College's fifth president] about it. He was a short-lived president of a year. Although he gave support to the project, nothing was ever accomplished. Then it was our most recent president, who just retired a few months ago, Scott Lensink, who signed off on it and gave us the space, the time, the energy and the manpower to first, initially just...

The reality is, we had the physical archives of our college located all over campus and at a variety of extension centers all over the district. There were course documents from presidents to their administrative staff, for instance, that were in broom closets, janitorial closets.

So, the first year-and-a-half or so, we used a room at the Workforce Development [Center], which is a building the college rents, next to the mall here in Mattoon. We just spent almost a year, year-and-a-half, collecting all that information, getting it to one central space, and then organizing it.

What I realized, too, as we were looking towards the future of writing this book, [was] the idea that, as soon as you write a book, it's outdated. So the idea was that the living archives should really be kind of a two-fold approach. It should be, A, organizing the current physical archives and creating a system for other future submissions and additions, but also creating

a way to share that with everyone in a way that didn't make it immediately dead, as was the case with a book.

Then we pitched the idea of having a website that would be kind of this interactive timeline. We did that, and I officially, formally finished my role on the archives probably two years ago, two-and-a-half years ago.

Pogue: There was a quote, "History is not what you thought; it is what you can remember." What's that mean?

Landrus: That was a quote by one of the earliest interviews we conducted with one of the first college employees. I believe his name was Jack Browning. He was in the...I want to say, the Technology department. He made this comment where he said, "History is not what I thought it was; it's just what I can remember." When pressed, essentially Mr. Brown said that what I'm communicating to you at this moment is what I can remember about those incidences, those conversations. So, it's only what I can remember; it's not necessarily what I was thinking or feeling at that time, at that exact moment.

It really resonated with me that, as we were trying to capture what was going on in sixty-seven, sixty-eight, sixty-nine, even if we were able to look at some really wonderful primary sources, even if we were able to talk to people who were tangentially related with an event, we're still looking at it from a different perspective, and we're still getting the opinions of people whose lives have changed. I thought when he said that, that was a really thoughtful observation about the difficult nature of truly articulating what happened twenty, thirty, forty years ago.

Pogue: How did you select what would be listed in the living archives?

Landrus: That's a great question. It's one that we get asked a lot. Initially, what we decided was that each decade would get twenty initial entries, not that future employees couldn't add to that, but we initially just picked a number of twenty. Then we said, okay, if we're going to put twenty things on the living archives website for the 1970s, for example, what should those twenty things be?

We kind of focused on events or situations that were first-time things or something that influenced the future of the college or an individual whose stature or status directly impacted the college at that time or the dealings and workings of the college at a later date. It really was... In a lot of ways, one of the most challenging elements of getting the website up and off the ground was deciding what those twenty were.

Pogue: How is the website maintained today?

Landrus: The website is now the responsibility of the Creative Services and Communications Office. That's a relatively fancy way of saying that's the

people who promote the college. They're the ones who send out press releases to newspapers and take photographs of commencement and such activities.

There's a living archives task force, made up of a variety of employees whose responsibility is to look at possible submissions, and then, if they're deemed worthy of putting on the website, then going out and doing that.

Pogue: Let's take a brief look at each of the decades that you did research on. We'll start with the 1960s. What are some of the key items there?

Landrus: I think that, first of all, two names stand out. One is Virgil Judge. He was Lake Land College's first president, but at the time, he was also the superintendent of schools in the Mattoon area. He'd been a lifelong member of local education. He'd been an elementary school teacher. He'd been a principal. The other name is a local businessman by the name of Clem Phipps, who owned a shoe store downtown.

Although this was never formally confirmed, a variety of people who knew President Judge indicated that Virgil was discouraged by the opportunity for his own son to attend a four-year university because of some of his own obstacles and challenges to the learning process. He felt that his son was going to miss out on an opportunity to pursue a degree in higher education that other young people, with the means, had. That became kind of a passion and a mission of his, to bring a community college to the area.

Clem Phipps recognized that, as an astute businessman, that a community college was going to bring more employees, more customers to his shop. I think he had altruistic purposes too. He wanted to do what was best for the local community.

So, yeah, there was a lot of hardworking, ambitious people. That was one of the things that I was struck by when I first did some of the interviews about those very, very early days, was just how—and this isn't meant to be hyperbolic—how extraordinarily ambitious and excited some of these, most of those core group of individuals who started the college were.

I think it is sometimes challenging to wrap your mind around that a community college didn't exist here. It wasn't something that you just decided to do one day, and you did it. But in a lot of ways, that's what they did. Just through sheer strength of will, they made it happen. Whether it was drumming up support from local newspapers to help support their cause, whether it was holding kind of town hall meetings at high schools to get people involved, to get them excited about it, they really realized that an organized, grassroots effort was the essential key to bringing a college to the area. And they did that; they did that.

Pogue: What was the first controversy that you included in your archive?

Landrus: I thought that was important to include in the website. At the time that I was wanting to include it, there were a few people who felt like I shouldn't include it, that somehow that the living archive website was supposed to be essentially a gigantic billboard, advertising the college. I thought it was important to include what was their first controversy.

It's worth noting that the college has a really, really warm relationship with the local newspapers [the *Mattoon Journal Gazette*], especially with a man by the name of [Bill] Lair, who was the publisher and editor. And the local newspapers always were supportive of the college in those early years, in terms of getting funding, talking about referendums and the like. But this is one of those issues where even the local newspapers kind of took the college to task.

What happened was that, at one of the very, very early board meetings, the board of trustees decided that they were going to provide support and resources to a Christian center that was going to be located at a local Methodist Church and that they were going to provide chairs and tables and such. Even though tax money wouldn't be used to fund or support the initiative, some monies from the college would be used.

It didn't take very long, maybe a day or two, before there was this kind of this outcry from newspapers in Decatur and Springfield and Danville, and then even our own local one, that said, first of all, the fact that you're calling it a Christian center is going to ostracize individuals of other faiths, and secondly, that isn't the role of an institution of higher learning. They eventually backed off of that, kind of recognized that it had been a mistake, and then pulled any funding or support for it.

Pogue: Could you describe how the college got its name and how the campus got located here?

Landrus: The name, the Lakers, really reflects a hopeful future belief that this area was going to be the home of a lot of lakes. In other words, all of the interviewees indicated that, before Shelbyville was named the site of the Army Corps of Engineers lake, that Mattoon or the area between Mattoon and Charleston was also flagged as a possible site. So there were a lot of individuals who said that it was going to happen, of course it's going to happen. We're going to get a lake; you're going to have Lake Charleston. You already have Lake Mattoon; you have Lake Paradise; now there's going to be this other gigantic lake built. It only seems natural that we would be called the Lakers. That's how they got its name.

Now, in terms of where it was located... I was thinking about this again yesterday, but it was something that I often smiled about as I was initially looking at some of the primary research. When the college was deciding where they were going to put the campus, it was before local

counties had decided whether or not, by a voter count, whether they wanted to be part of the community college. When the board members were pressed about where they were going to put it, they would say, “Well, we think it is very, very premature to make a decision on the location right now, before we have all of the data and research to tell us where would be the best place.”

The reality is, they were probably saying that because if you said, “Well, we want to put it in Mattoon,” then that might mean Effingham and their voters may not decide to come into the district. So they waited until that initial vote of the local counties before they decided Mattoon.

Now, why Mattoon? You could certainly say, as the board did at the time, that it was kind of the center of where the district would be, that it was close to EIU and so on. But if you look at who were the members of those very early steering committees and who were going to be on the board, who was on the board and who the administrators were, a fair number of them were from Mattoon.

Clem Phipps was the chairperson of the board. He was from Mattoon. Yantis was from Mattoon. Virgil H. Judge, who was the president, was from Mattoon. Dr. [Robert] Webb was superintendent of Shelbyville but was very familiar with Mattoon and had a lot of friends here. It just... It did make sense geographically; it made sense economically; it made sense in a lot of ways. But I think on a purely human level, they kind of liked the idea of it being in Mattoon as well.

Pogue: Looking at the 1970s, what were some of the highlights then?

Landrus: I think a couple of things stand out about the seventies. One is that we recognized—I say we, I say the Lake Land College family—recognized that the inspired enthusiasm of local communities to support us financially through referendums was starting to wane and that you have a variety of referendums that start to fail. That’s kind of a precursor, I think, to what kind of happened in the eighties, more succinctly. I think you have the recognition that there may not be this kind of warm embrace being offered to the college by people in the community because they don’t like to see taxes go up; they don’t like to see them have to pay to fund the school.

I think that Dr. Webb becoming our second president was really important. I think he brought a really scholarly, academic...really kind of a heady approach to how to govern the school. I think his leadership was instrumental.

For me, personally, I think the two things, though, that are most important about the seventies are linked. I think Mary Hill Dobbs being named the first female board of trustee member was key. I think her fiery,

independent, speak-her-mind outlook was good for the school. I think it was good for a rural community that may not have experienced that.

I think, because of her, she was then key and instrumental to what happened in the eighties, when the child care lab was opened. I think that was something that... At least in [the minds of] the students and the employees of Lake Land College, having a child care lab is something that we're very proud of. And I think it's something that ultimately is attributed to Mary Hill Dobbs.

Pogue: There was another longtime trustee during the seventies. Could you describe that individual?

Landrus: Leland Glazebrook may, in many ways, be the—although they shared certain personality traits—may have been the opposite of Mary Hill Dobbs, who, although spirited, would attempt to use, I think, a well-conceived, articulate, intelligent argument to convince people on the board. And if that didn't work, then she'd just use her strength and will.

But Leland Glazebrook was kind of a jack of all trades, somebody who made record albums, who owned a radio station, was a local farmer, who really spoke from the hip, spoke what was on his mind, and was somebody who you could trust to go to Springfield and hobnob with state officials and state politicians and sing the praises of Lake Land College and community colleges in general. I think that that helped provide or offer some financial and fiscal support later on.

Pogue: What were some exciting things in the eighties?

Landrus: I think that one of the most important things that happened in the eighties was the Center for Business and Industry. I think it was when Dr. Robert K. Luther came in and realized that some of the referendums that had failed before him, also initially under his watch, signaled that a local tax base, as well as tuition and state support, were simply not going to be enough to move the college forward into the nineties, the two thousands, and the twenty-first century.

I think that he was visionary in his ability to say, we have to find other means to generate revenue and so reaching out to local businesses via this entity of the Center for Business and Industry. Even today, at the Work Force Development [Center] in Mattoon, Illinois, you have the Center for Technology and Industry. That is a place where [RR] Donelleys or ICTC [Illinois Consolidated Telephone Company] or other local businesses can go to use for training and retraining opportunities.

Pogue: What was this Dunker Duck mascot?

Landrus: Dunker Duck mascot was... That's one of those fun things to discover, because there was nothing ever written down about it. You'd say, "How did we get our nickname?" "I don't know, you may want to talk to so and so."

You may want to talk to this person.” Finally, it got traced back to the very first English instructor Lake Land College ever hired. He was also the college’s first Humanities Division chair, a man by the name of Wally Taylor.

Wally Taylor was an avid basketball fan, loved our team. [He] was at a game and was amazed by the number of instances when our players would be able to dunk the ball. He suggested to the athletic department that they should be called the Dunker Ducks and wrote something to them about it. It simply kind of took off. In fact, that’s probably why we have ducks too, because we have the ponds; we have the lakes. So they just started called them the Dunker Ducks.

Pogue: We get o your time in the 1990s. What were some of the highlights there?

Landrus: I think the nineties could be best referred to... The nineties and the early 2000s, could be referred to as the Camelot days. It’s when we were—especially in the mid-nineties—where we’re having massive upgrades to the infrastructure of the college. We’re having new carpet for the first time in buildings for years. You’re having new paint. You’re having this impetus to not just hunker down and keep what you have, but to expand, to build buildings, and to try to get bigger. You have Dr. Luther seeking more and more money from the state and being an extraordinarily eloquent, articulate, hard-working advocate for bringing more money to the college through those means. It never hurt that Jim Edgar [38th Governor of Illinois] was a Charleston native. The fact that he was governor during some of those years when we were getting a lot of funding was really nice too.

I think that the Child Care Lab opening up, at least the continued running of the Child Care Lab, was important.

The [Illinois] Prairie Higher Education Consortium I think is really important, and I think it will be proved to be historically significant, ten, twenty, thirty years from now because it was a recognition by educators in the state that education was not going to be location-bound and furthermore, that education necessarily wasn’t going to be strictly occurring in a brick and mortar setting. That internet consortium, Prairie Consortium, was a group of employees from the community colleges all over the state providing opportunities for students to take those classes. Someone from Parkland might take a class from somebody here on campus, and they may do that via a distance learning lab.

In a lot of ways, it was the precursor to what we see as an explosive online educational environment today. I think that if someone would have said to me in 1996, “In 2013 the vast majority of your department’s classes will be taught online,” I would have said, “Absolutely not, that can’t happen.” That’s a different world that I live in. And yet that’s the case today, and I think that the prairie consortium certainly was the impetus to that.

Pogue: Moving to the 2000s, what has been happening during that decade?

Landrus: I think the opening of the east classroom building. It's 65,000 square feet or something. It's an enormous technology building, but also includes the cosmetology department. Our focus on becoming a green campus... I think that almost all of our buildings now—I think the last one will be completed in the next year or so—all of our buildings are to be heated and cooled by geothermal means. Our wind turbines... I think that Lake Land has proven itself to be an institution that wants to be really proactive in that way. I think coming up in the fall will be our fourth energy conference, where we bring in individuals to talk about ways of taking care of Mother Earth.

I think that you can't overlook the incident with Dr. Thallemer, the president whose tenure was clearly cut short. He was the college's fifth president, and he came in after the college's probably most popular president to that point, Robert Luther, Dr. Robert Luther, and came in with a lot of fanfare, a lot of excitement. He was an energetic, enthusiastic person. His leadership style, though, I think, conflicted with the approach many people took. Him resigning after a year, it was pretty public; it was kind of nasty at times. I think that was something most people remember about the two thousands.

Pogue: How did Lake Land deal with the expansion? You talked early about seven counties, and then you mention now there's thirteen counties. Where are other extension centers?

Landrus: We have extension centers at... The largest one, obviously—I don't even know if they call it an extension anymore—it's the Kluthe Center in Effingham. It's an enormous building, and there's going to be actually a new section of that building built. We have Pana; we have Marshall Extension Center, and on occasion, there are classes taught at Sarah Bush [Lincoln] [a hospital in Mattoon, Illinois], and there's also ones taught at the Charleston High School.

What's interesting, though, is the popularity of online classes have even made the need for certain extension centers slightly archaic and unnecessary.

Pogue: How has the campus changed during your tenure? You've talked about the online courses and the green initiatives. Are there some other areas?

Landrus: I would say that—not to belabor the point—but what the definition of a campus is has changed. It's something that, when I first started I would have never thought that I wouldn't have a clear, concise understanding of what Lake Land College's campus meant. But as you continue to expand, not only the physical borders of a location, but also include the worldwide web, what is a campus seems to change.

I'd also add that the thing that I find most interesting is that I'm getting old, and I'm getting older. When I came in seventeen years ago, I was one of about twenty-seven or twenty-eight new faculty members. We were all being brought in at the same time, as there was this mass exodus of retirees. And we're getting older; we're getting older. Now we're thinking about things and ten to eleven years of retiring, and we're thinking about reflecting on what it was that we brought to the educational environment at Lake Land and what our legacies are and whether we're getting too old to do this anymore.

It has changed a lot, and when you're twenty-three, and you make a reference to something that's going on in popular culture, you can pretty much be guaranteed that your seventeen, eighteen, nineteen year-old students are going to know the reference. But when you're forty years old, and you're making reference to someone like, say, John Lennon or Paul McCartney, there are instances where there'll be some people who don't know who that is or who those individuals are.² So, that idea of feeling a little out of touch is certainly paramount.

Pogue: You were a student here. How has the student body changed or stayed the same since then?

Landrus: I think that, by and large, that... Everything is cyclical, first of all, so it's hard to recognize trends. But I think, for the most part, for good or ill—and I could speak to both of those—but for good or ill, I think students are a little more focused on what they want to do, that the days of a student coming in and just saying, “I don't know exactly what I want to do with my life, but I want to take some classes and I want to explore a variety of disciplines and see if something fits.” I see that is not so much the case anymore. I see students coming in saying, “I want to be a business administration major,” or “I want to be a pharmacologist,” or “I want to be an elementary education instructor.” So, day one, they are extraordinarily motivated and directed on a particular goal.

On the one hand, on the surface, that seems to be a good thing, and it is. It's important to be motivated. But I think when students fail to recognize that I'm a phys ed [physical education] major, but, man, what if I really, really learn something fascinating about history? or what if I found something really interesting about literature? I think that that sense of wonderment and that ability to use college as a place to figure out what you want to do with life has kind of changed.

² Lennon–McCartney the songwriting partnership between English musicians John Lennon (1940–1980) and Paul McCartney (born 1942) of the Beatles. It is the best known and most successful musical collaboration ever by records sold, with the Beatles selling over 600 million records worldwide as of 2004. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lennon%E2%80%93McCartney>)

Pogue: What has been the relationship with the area high schools and the community? Obviously, Lake Land had to rely on a lot of referendums. As I've talked around the state, some community colleges have not even had to run any since their existence. Lake Land has had to run many, and you're spread out over thirteen counties. How have the relationships been?

Landrus: I think that the fact that referendums fail, and the administration and board recognized that trying to go to that well, simply isn't profitable, indicates that there are a fair number of people in the community who see a disconnect between what Lake Land does and what Lake Land can do and how it may benefit them.

The reality is that people just don't... People are uncomfortable spending money on schools, and Lake Land is no different. I think we've always had a good partnership with the high schools. The advent of dual credit classes has really forced us to make that happen, whether we like it or not. We have to have a partnership with the high schools.

I think that's really a thoughtful point. It is kind of hard, maybe, for somebody in Cowden-Herrick, to appreciate what Lake Land College does for them because to them it is far away. It's forty-five to fifty minutes, and the idea that they're going to have to support that financially may be hard for them to come to terms with.

Pogue: What has been the relationship with Eastern? That's your alma mater. Does Lake Land have partnerships with the four-year institutions?

Landrus: Sure. Somewhere about 2003, 2004, the Illinois Articulation Initiative [IAI] was established, which indicated that any student who earns an associate's degree at one of the community colleges must be swept in as a junior to the four-year school. The only exception to that is the flagship university, the U of I [University of Illinois], who still refuses to acknowledge that. That legislation, in and of itself, kind of required or forced—whether they wanted to or not—for the two-year schools and the four-year schools to partner up and meet up and say, "Okay, if we have to do this, how are we going to make sure that its done correctly?" The IAI helps us do that.

In terms of EIU, our sister school, I think it's a division-by-division partnership. For example, the business department has a very, very healthy, rich, productive, proactive relationship with the Lumpkin School of Business [at EIU]. But I don't know if that's necessarily the case with, say, the art department. They may not even know, necessarily, the names of the EIU faculty there. It's a division-by-division relationship.

Pogue: Are there any partnerships with Indiana schools, since you are on the border?

Landrus: Yes. We have a two plus two agreement with Indiana State, which is essentially the same as the IAI, and so we tell our Lake Land College students

here that, if you earn your associate degree at Lake Land College, Indiana State has promised that they will sweep you in as a junior.

Pogue: What do you see as the biggest challenges for Lake Land over the next five years?

Landrus: It's money; it's absolutely money. We are receiving the same level of funding that we were receiving probably a decade ago. We're months and months and months and months and months behind payments from the state. Even though Lake Land College is one of the most fiscally responsible institutions in the state, it's hard to sustain that. At some point, either employees will have to be let go; programs will have to be cut; equipment and departments like chemistry or the ag department may have to be curtailed. That's unfortunate. But clearly how we are going to have enough money to do what it is we do on a daily basis, I think, is key.

Pogue: Does Lake Land have any unique programs because of the employers found in the thirteen counties?

Landrus: I think one of the things that separates us from most schools is our John Deere Ag Tech Program. That reflected, I think, what was going on in the eighties, as well, and it continues to be one of the most popular. If I'm not mistaken, we're one of three places in the United States where you can go, and you can receive a degree on working on John Deere farm implements. That, again, reflects that pioneering spirit of the eighties, where, okay, if we can't have a referendum pass, how are we going to find money to pay for programs? The John Deere is one of them.

Certainly not unique to a community college, but our nursing program and our dental hygiene are probably the single best in the state. That's not me saying that; that's statistics saying it. When you think about Lake Land, I think most people will tell you four things: education, right, in terms of those students who want to eventually transfer to EIU to be an elementary education teacher; they'll talk about our ag program; they'll talk about nursing, and they'll talk about dental hygiene.

Pogue: As we conclude our interview today, what do you feel have been the biggest accomplishments for the college, having been a student here and now on the faculty and having done the living archives?

Landrus: I'd say the accomplishment of always looking forward, always recognizing that something else is going to emerge as a catalyst for change in education. They need to be at the forefront of that. Whether it is tapping into relationships with local businesses, whether it is—long before anyone did—creating partnerships with local high schools to create dual credit. Long before we necessarily needed a new technology building, pursuing all of the avenues to make that happen before it was a dire necessity. And, as a final example,

our being a green initiative. We know that people can't continue to deplete the resources of our earth as we currently do. The model is not sustainable. And Lake Land saying we're going to find ways to ultimately leave a zero-carbon footprint. I think it is not only admirable and noble, but I think it is also very forward thinking. I think those are all great accomplishments.

Pogue: Well, Matt, I want to thank you very much for being part of our Lincoln Presidential Library project on the history and development of the community college and your work on the living archives, your work here as a student, and now as a faculty member. Thank you very much.

Landrus: Thank you, Phil. It's been my pleasure.

(end of transcript)